



# Mesas And Muses: The Effectiveness Of Translation Strategies In The Transfer Of Culturally Specific References In Tim Winton's *Dirt Music*

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THIS paper describes and analyses the effectiveness of the translation strategies selected by the Italian translator of Tim Winton's *Dirt Music* (2000). A superficial reading of the novel reveals a narrative that appears to be middle-brow, not particularly literary and easily translatable but I argue that this text actually enjoys a quite sophisticated relationship with the culture in which it is embedded. Within the Anglo-American literary tradition, famous exponents of English romanticism and their works are instrumental in signposting the *topos* of the individual's search for solace through communion with the sublime. However, in the Australian literary tradition, this theme has been filtered by "a different society and under different circumstances" so that the universal theme of English romanticism has become culturally specific in an Australian discourse where Nature is often hostile and threatening. In the case of *Dirt Music*, I maintain that this marker of 'Australianness' forms part of an "underlying network of signification within the text as a whole" and, as such, should be maintained in an intercultural transfer (Berman, 2000:292-3).

*Dirt Music* narrates the story of Georgie Jutland, companion of Jim Buckridge, the most successful fisherman in White Point, a small coastal town in Western Australia, and a mid-life crisis which sees her fall in love with Luther Fox. Fox has lost all sense of purpose in life since the tragic death of his family and lives on the fringes of society, making ends meet by illegal fishing. He abandons everything when his poaching and his liaison with Georgie are discovered, heading into the desert to find that peace





which eludes him in civilisation. So begins a journey for all three members of the triangle, each with a past full of regrets, unresolved grief and lost hopes: "a journey across landscapes within and without" according to the dust jacket of the first edition (Picador, 2000). The metaphorical journey sees all three protagonists reconcile themselves with their past and the physical journey finds them reunited in a near-tragedy from which Georgie and Luther escape unharmed and free to pursue their relationship.

My analysis of this text centres on Sections III and IV of *Dirt Music* in which Fox makes his journey north. The landscapes through which he moves in these pages are archetypically representative of the dichotomy through which Australian sites are characterised: ruggedly sublime but often threatening. Winton explores his protagonist's mind against landscapes characterised by elements of natural and human desolation inviting the reader to recognise a symmetry between Fox's physical and psychological journeys. The introduction of a number of culturally specific references to well-known English Romantic writers at this point in the narrative further reinforces such a reading. The major tenet of this English literary tradition was indeed that consciousness of self was only attainable through communion with the sublime as represented by nature. Winton in these pages is mapping that tradition through the specifically Australian cultural filter of landscape. The recovery of such connections between different literary traditions is crucial to an understanding of the 'Australianness' of this text.

The themes of desolation and isolation recur often as Winton puts them to work both to enhance the purgatorial aspects of his landscape and to signpost the devastating effect of man in nature. The abandoned asbestos mine at Wittenoom, where Fox's father died and which is one destination on his 'mission' is characterised in the menacing terms of oppressive colours: "a gorge [that] rises like a breaking wave, red, purple, black" (235). Similarly despoiled is Port Hedland, described in terms of a "stretch of road festooned with shredded radials, beasts and beercans" characterised by "the salt piles...ris[ing] above the plain...a badlands of power pylons...disassembled road-trains...hitchhikers sleeping beside cartons of Emu Bitter" (238-239). As Fox ventures on, he finds himself at



“a crossroads of some moment...[where]...the roads signs have three- or four-digit distances...[and] he tries to imagine the gibber plains and red dunes to the east, the impossible amplitude of the continent” (221). Later in the text, we are told there are “two-storey road signs...Perth is 1650 kilometres south and Kununurra the same distance north. Halfway feels like no way” (240). The imagery is intense, signifying metaphorically Fox’s position as a lost soul in a vast and hostile landscape.

Similarly to the natural landscape, the characters Fox encounters are metaphors of a nature wrought by an ungodly hand: like the land itself they are worn-out and tired. Rusty is a one-legged dope-fiend; Nora – barely 16 – is adrift and at the mercy of strangers, her only currency being her body; Bess is dying of bowel cancer and her husband Horrie is accompanying her “on a mission” (244) to die up north. Winton characterises the passing parade of humanity on the isolated Western Australian highways as: “pilgrims, traders, refugees, crusaders, lunatics” (252) of the Middle Ages and Byzantium – all terms which create a fictive space of voyages of faith, hope and desperation across alien landscapes.

Winton uses the character of Bess – located in her own personal purgatorial site – to signpost those themes usually associated with the English Romantics poets. Bess too is retreating into the landscape for “something big...And north is where you get it” (247- 48). She is on a flight from the existential problems of the ‘ordinary’ in much the same way as Fox and, having established this symmetry through the journey as “mission” (244), Winton introduces a mutual appreciation of the English Romantics to cement it even further. Through the names of Byron, Blake, Wordsworth and Keats (245) he marks the *topos* of the inner search which is synonymous with their works. This theme is again taken up later in the text when Georgie discovers that in Fox’s poetry anthology, “Wordsworth, Blake and Keats, were bruised with underscorings. Robinson Jeffers, Heaney, R.S. Thomas, Les Murray and Judith Wright bore asterisks and exclamation marks...” (333). Such a heterogeneous list of names – belonging to different centuries and different continents – cannot escape the attention of the reader. The one common factor that unites them is their concern with man and his degraded condition in urban society



and, in particular Australian society in the case of Les Murray and Judith Wright. These poets may be considered Australia's latter day Romantics, continuing a tradition which began with Charles Harpur and Henry Kendall, the first Australian-born poets to filter the notion of the sublime through Australian landscapes.

Further allusions to the English Romantics appear towards the end of the narrative when Fox has reached his final destination of Coronation Gulf. Here, as he begins to find solace through the music which he manages to create in nature, he reflects on his abandoned collection of books in the house outside White Point. In this passage, Winton refers to possibly the best-known works of William Wordsworth as Fox imagines himself "scrambling up through the crags of *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*" (369). It is however Winton's reference to the "opium-addled poet going again to the darkness for what couldn't live in nature" (380) which I find most significant in the context of this narrative. He is, of course, referring to Samuel Coleridge and by association to *The Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge's poem of the seafarer who is cursed to lead a solitary life wandering the seas for his sin against Nature; the thoughtless shooting of an albatross. The works of Coleridge are linked with Byron, Mary Shelley and a literary production typical of a darker form of Romanticism. These writers questioned the Wordsworthian concept of communion with the sublime through nature and their writings often feature outcasts from society. Frequently, their characters such as the Ancient Mariner or Victor Frankenstein's monster expiate their sins against God and nature by wandering through hostile, desolate landscapes, alone and misunderstood. It would appear that, at this point, Winton's culturally specific allusion to Coleridge is signposting a connection between the European romantic tradition and its specifically Australian contextualisation. Like the Ancient Mariner and Frankenstein's monster, Fox is cast in the role of the outsider who wanders alone, not through the frozen wastes of Northern Europe nor across the seven seas, but rather in the rugged and isolated Gulf Country of North Western Australia. It is only in this landscape that Fox finally comes to terms with his relationship with his dead brother, Darkie and sister-in-law, Sal, the musicians of the 'dirt music'. Injured and



lost, he confronts that dark side of himself and speculates if, envious of their passion for each other and resentful of their cruel flaunting of this love, he may not have committed a crime against God and Nature and unconsciously occasioned their death. I maintain that the introduction of this darker aspect of the English Romantic search for self in nature, filtered through the 'weird melancholy' of the landscape, is mapping one of the most recognisable characteristics of a specifically Australian literary tradition.

Nature and the landscape provide alternatives for the writer when a society is new and the culture not well-established. In such circumstances, according to Robert Darling, what is essentially background material for other more established literatures becomes the focus of the search for a national identity (1997:9). The first Australian settlers found it impossible to contextualise Australia as place within a European framework. The literary production of the colony – typically the letters and journals of settlers and explorers – represented attempts to construct a world in which the familiar natural phenomena which constituted European time and space had been supplanted by alien landscapes and time frames. In this manner, the geographical space known as Australia became a “rhetorical construct, a product of language” dominated by difference couched in the myth of landscape (Carter, 1987:36).

The manner in which we interpret space, according to David Malouf, leads to the making of “our first maps of reality, how we mythologise spaces and through that mythology (a good deal of it inherited) find our way into a culture” (1985:3). Others like Lawrence Bourke claim that we identify with landscape not only because it is familiar to us but because it also occupies an institutional site, i.e. the images have gone “beyond description to become a symbol” (Westerly, 1993, 1:17). As Graeme Turner argues, “narratives are ultimately produced by the culture ... they generate meanings, take on a significance and assume forms that are *articulations* of the values, beliefs – the ideology – of the culture” (1993:vi, original italics). It is this construction of ‘preferred’ meaning which conditions an Australian readership to read fictive spaces as typically Australian.

Within the specific discourse of landscape, Australian writers have



characteristically deployed that opposition between Nature and Society which marked the English Romantic literary tradition. This pattern is evidenced by the preference for rural over urban settings, country versus city which, as noted by Turner, "seem[s] basic to a wide range of Australian texts" (1993:26). There is however in these Australian narratives, a re-working of this romantic theme which noted poet Judith Wright has described as the 'double aspect': a manifestation of Australians' status as, at once, new settlers and European exiles. Australian writing in this tradition can be read as an attempt to reconcile that duality, to simultaneously represent "the reality of newness and freedom and the reality of exile" in a specifically national discourse (ibid: 25). What emerges often through this Australian contextualisation of the European romantic theme is a concept of metaphysical transcendency whereby landscapes are characterised as menacing as well as promising. Such representations see the land assume different positions varying between paradise and hell, all intrinsically endowed however with a spirituality against which the protagonist takes his or her measure.

The menacing landscape is a feature of works by Wright and other Australian authors such as Patrick White, Randolph Stow and indeed Tim Winton. It constitutes one of the most familiar *topoi* in Australian cultural production and it is one that Europeans retrieve with ease because of its association with the exotic 'Other'. Some other instances of the use of the 'weird melancholy' of the Australian landscape are to be found in director Peter Weir's iconic *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), Ray Lawrence's recent film *Jindabyne* (2006), as well as in Patrick White's *Voss* (1957) and Randolph Stow's *To the Islands* (1958) to name a few. Such texts, cinematic or literary, are haunted by harsh and indifferent landscapes which heighten the picaresque *topos* of the quest as the subject wanders fictive sites that Veronica Brady has described as "purgatorial, the place of the ordeal which reveals the possibilities which may emerge from the pain", rather than paradisaical (1979:179). A further dichotomy in the representation of Australian spaces is to be found in the traditional realism which characterised much Australian narrative up until the post war years and the modernist approach subsequently introduced by Patrick White



during the 1950s and beyond. I suggest that an essential part of locating *Dirt Music* in a specifically Australian discourse lies in recognising the modernist use of landscape within the Australian realist tradition.

The Nationalist writings of the 1880s and 1890s, exemplified by the works of Henry Lawson and A.B.Paterson, had fostered an Australian identity which was centred upon the bush, both as landscape and as social environment. It was the product of a realist tradition which characterised Australian spaces as essentially rural and privileged larrikinism, egalitarianism and laconic mateship as quintessentially Australian attributes. This form of realism dominated Australian literary production well into the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but tensions arose within Australian literary circles with the gradual evolution from rural to urban society. Writers of the traditionalist school were met with opposition by those who sought to create Australian forms of European literary traditions. One of the foremost exponents of this latter group was Patrick White who, on returning to post-war Australia expressed outrage at what he believed was the spiritual vacuum in Australian society and the 'dun-coloured' nature of realist narrative.

Susan Lever observes that White successfully demonstrated how "the traditional subjects of Australian fiction and legend – the settler and the explorer – could be re-written as the focus of contemporary questions about the relationship of the individual to god and society" (1998:311). In novels such as *The Tree of Man* (1955), *Riders in the Chariot* (1961) and *Voss*, White succeeded in endowing the realist tradition with a spiritual meaning beyond the mundane facts of everyday life. It is not a difficult endeavour to recognise parallels between White and Winton both in their portrayals of subjects who "...reject, or... rejected by, the inhabitants of suburbia...can enjoy the sufferings, the privileges and triumphs of an idiosyncratic, spiritual insight" and their use of the landscape to characterise the destructive presence of human beings in an otherwise pristine environment (Kramer, 1974:152).

In his earlier narratives such as *Cloudstreet* (1991) and *The Riders* (1994), the physical landscapes Winton constructs are diverse. The backgrounds change from suburban Perth of the 1950s to European landscapes of later



years. The element that characterises and links all Winton's work however is his use of landscapes to provide a literal framework for the metaphorical representation of the mental traveller on a journey of discovery. In a specifically Australian tradition which can be traced back to Stow and White, Winton's narratives bear the characteristics of "a modern and localised *Pilgrim's Progress* in which the rough and smooth are translated into accurate landscape images, reflecting not the eye but the mind of the beholder" (Kramer, 1974:152). It is my opinion that only through the acknowledgment of the role of such culturally specific traditions in national narratives that successful intercultural transfers can take place.

Within Reiss' translation-oriented typology, narrative texts are defined as expressive texts with their function being to foreground the individual aesthetic dimension of the writer (1971:38). Such texts are culturally-embedded because readers assume that there is an authorial intention to reveal his/her own culture's ideas, values and convictions. Accordingly, the novel *Dirt Music* may be seen as representing a distinctively Australian discourse which allows the reader some insight into the way in which the culture perceives itself. As a genre the novel presents an "alternative world full of its own situations", a fictive space constructed by an intertextual network which Beaugrande and Dressler describe as "texts within a text" (Snell-Hornby, 1988:112). A more detailed definition is afforded by Hatim and Mason who refer to "the existence of prior discourses as a precondition for the act of signifying, almost regardless of the semantic content of a given text" (1990:121). Intertextual networks are largely culturally specific as the cultural repertoire of a particular society will be based on that society's collective experiences. They present in various forms, for example, as culturally specific allusions which refer to well-known pre-existing texts or proper names and constitute a major problem for translation. This is due to the fact that when narratives are moved across intercultural boundaries, a strategy must be found for solutions not only at the semantic level but also with regards to these culturally embedded items. It is essential therefore that the translator be aware of the cultural implications embedded in the original text before deciding whether, following Schleiermacher, s/he "disturbs the writer as little



as possible and moves the reader in his direction, or disturbs the reader as little as possible and moves the writer in his direction" (in Robinson, 1997:229).

The intertextual networks present in *Dirt Music* will allow a source language reader with some degree of literary competence to produce a reading of the narrative that goes beyond the mesas and buttes, and recover a sub-text which Winton has gone to considerable trouble to signpost. I argue that the competent translator must assume this responsibility for the target culture. Reading positions available to consumers in the target culture – be they either members of the general public or in institutional roles such as critical reviewers – will ultimately be shaped by the translation produced. It was James Holmes who situated reviews within the sub-set of translation criticism in his map of what he termed the 'applied' branch of translation studies (Holmes, 1988b/2000:172-85). Critical reviews are utilised by Reception theorists to ascertain how the translated text meets, disappoints or challenges a reader's general expectations with regard to the characteristics of the genre such as style, content and form. Reception theory has been used by translation scholars such as Ronald Christ, (1982), Meg Brown (1984), Lawrence Venuti (1998), and Jeremy Munday (1998) and I have relied on this theoretical framework to develop my views on the reception of the Italian translation of *Dirt Music*.

Published in 2005 by Fazi Editore, the translation was carried out by Maurizio Bartocci who has translated other Australian writers such as Sally Morgan and Dorothy Porter. My discussion of the target text (TT) begins with five reviews published in the Italian media which were sourced from the publisher's website.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most important issues which Venuti highlights in his discussion of reviewers' comments on his translations of the Italian poet Ugo Tarchetti (1998:18-20) is the lack of any mention of the translator or his work. He has coined the phrase "the translator's invisibility" to describe the tendency in the Anglo-American publishing industry to privilege the creation of a TT which is "transparent" or gives the impression of having been originally written in the target language. None of the five reviews of *Dirt Music* which I refer to makes any mention of Bartocci's

role in making this Australian text available to an Italian reading public but interestingly, three of them refer to Tim Winton's authorial 'style'. Francesca Gigli comments: "His style is unmistakable".<sup>5</sup> Renzo Crivelli remarks how Winton's narration is "tight, sometimes hard, bare with his dialogues which fit in with descriptive passages like poetic captions".<sup>6</sup> Both these comments indicate the degree to which the TT has passed for the original especially if one considers, in the first example, that Winton's novels have been translated by three different Italian translators and, in the second example, the acknowledged difficulty in transferring the nuances of idiomatic language across cultural boundaries. One of Winton's earlier novels, *The Riders* (1994) was translated by Isabella Ciapetti but here too, despite its having been filtered by a different translator, the style is described as one of "...absolute mastery...sustained by a succinct and bare prose".<sup>7</sup> The issue at stake here is the perception of a language and a style that is attributed to Winton rather than the acknowledgment of its specific role in the Australian English literary tradition.

More than one of the reviews cited attempts to situate Winton within the canonical Anglo-American literary culture: the better-known 'Other' in which Australian literature is a minor player. In her review of the TT, Gigli disturbs Wallas (sic) Stegner, American writer, environmentalist and 1972 Pulitzer prize winner, and quotes from his "Wilderness Letter" of 1960, asserting that Stegner was really talking about Australia.<sup>8</sup> Maura Murizzi compares the sexual tension between Georgie and Fox to that between Holly Hunter and Harvey Keitel in Jane Campion's *The Piano* (set in New Zealand and which enjoyed an outstanding success in Italy), adding that the film is "...closely related to the novel because of its Australianness, its landscapes and its scandals in broad daylight".<sup>9</sup> Finally, Crivelli describes Fox as "a latter day Robinson Crusoe" suggesting maybe that Winton be considered in the exalted company of Daniel De Foe.<sup>10</sup>

Jeremy Munday asserts that, in ways such as this, 'Other' authors are "subsumed into the...US or general literary heritage" and reviews of other novels by Winton provide excellent examples of this tendency on the part of Italian reviewers (1998: 141). The Italian translation of *Cloudstreet*, received a review which located Winton's work as "...suspended halfway

between the grand scope of the naturalists of the 1800s, Zola, Verga, Balzac and...the typical post-modern uneasiness of a McEwan or a Woolf".<sup>11</sup> The same reviewer also finds parallels with Steinbeck and Gàrcia Márquez.

A common perception among these reviewers regarded the role of landscape in Winton's narrative. From this point of view, all the critics cited went to great lengths to describe the geographical splendours of the Australian continent: "a nature endowed with magical beauty"<sup>12</sup>; the "boundless Australian landscapes"<sup>13</sup>; and "an island which slides off the map like a speck of dust".<sup>14</sup> Typically these reviews lean heavily on reinforcing the European imagining of Australia as an exotic location, full of beauty and terror and aboriginal populations possessed of an animism which lies hidden in Australia. Paola Pioppo goes so far as to describe Fox's journey as: "A fascinating voyage that reveals a continent [of]... virgin territories still worth penetrating".<sup>15</sup> The notions of penetration and conquest associated with this comment indicate a specifically Old World vision of the New World typified most famously in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: visions of conquest and exploitation in the interests of Empire. There seems to be no understanding that Fox's journey in Winton's original narrative is not one of conquest but one of the wandering outcast and his trial by the brutal elements of Nature.

I maintain that the above reviews demonstrate that what has been lost in this intercultural transfer is the specific "Australianness" of this particular narrative. The fact that Winton's authorial style is somehow assumed to have passed through the translation process intact is an opprobrious situation but one which falls outside the scope of this article. A factor which does however lend itself to critical comment is that the parameters of comparison have been those of a global Anglo-American tradition. Patrick White, canonical Australian writer and winner of the Nobel Prize, upon whose themes Winton has clearly drawn in the construction of his narrative, has been overlooked in favour of Gàrcia Márquez. The irony of this is unmistakable considering Gàrcia Márquez's own cultural traditions, also triumphantly subsumed into the dominant Anglo-American literary Olympus. Furthermore, these reviews illustrate how the failure to recognise Winton's tense engagement between nature



and culture as an articulation of a specifically Australian discourse has led to an overload in the evocation of an 'othered' landscape. Contextualised within the parameters of a European romantic literary tradition, this translation has failed to transfer the significance which Winton invests in Fox's mission north. The responsibility for this must lie with the translator and the strategies selected which have filtered out information which could have positioned these reviewers to read the TT differently.

I have argued that Winton's references to English Romanticism constitute examples of culturally specific item which Franco Xavier Aixelà defines as "... textually actualised items whose function and connotations in a ST involve a translation problem in their transference to a TT, whenever this problem is a product of the non-existence of the referred item or of its different intertextual status in the cultural system of the readers of the TT" (1996:58). Ritva Leppihalme defines such elements as representing a "culture bump" or "a situation where the TT reader has a problem understanding a source culture (SC) allusion because the allusion may fail to function in the TT...it may remain unclear and puzzling" (1997:4). Mary Snell-Hornby cites Hans Vermeer to support her claim that translators should be proficient "not only bilingually but also biculturally" as their expertise will determine firstly their level of understanding of the ST and consequently the quality of the TT they produce (1988:42). My discussion to this point highlights however the fact that occasions may well arise in which the translator must also be tri-culturally aware. In the case in point, a familiar European theme has been re-worked by another culture to produce a discourse constrained by different connotations and consequently the translator is faced with culturally specific allusions which have created a series of 'culture bumps'.

Aixelà proposes three alternative strategies for dealing with culturally specific references: conservation, substitution or explication. He maintains that the adoption of a specific translation strategy will be determined by the translator's appraisal of the culturally specific item's relevance, the frequency of its recurrence and its role in the textual coherence of the ST (1996: 96). Leppihalme lists similar solutions for dealing with allusions as regards conservation and substitution but also suggests the strategy of





omission. She lists the following alternatives within each of these broad categories:

- Conservation: use the name as such; use the name adding some guidance; use the name adding footnotes or endnotes;
- Substitution: replace the name with another SL name; replace the name with a TL name;
- Omission: omit the name but transfer the sense by other means such as a common noun; omit the name and the allusion altogether. (1997: 78)

On the basis of these strategies, a study of the translation of the references to the English Romantics in the aforementioned sections III and IV of *Dirt Music* reveals that the translator has consistently privileged conservation without providing any further guidance. In all the examples cited in this paper, the proper names both of famous literary figures of the English Romantic tradition (Blake, Wordsworth, Keats) and canonical works such as *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude*, are moved across the intercultural space which separates the source culture from the target culture without any explicitation. I cite one example and refer the reader to the verbatim translation in the footnote below: "...he [Fox] moves through their lines as a man walks through home country. He scrambles up through the crags of *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*, across hot, bright Emily and into the spiky undergrowth of Bill Blake. The lines come to him"<sup>16</sup> (369).

Another example of this strategy of faithfulness without explicitation is to be found in a verse composed by an exhausted Luther Fox adrift some kilometres off White Point. While on a poaching trip, he has been discovered by local fishermen who have killed his dog and incinerated his truck. With his fuel exhausted, a defeated Fox abandons his boat and swims shoreward. Overtaken by fatigue, he finds himself suspended between sea and sky, between life and death and the following lines come to him: 'Bill Blake did not a fisherman make but still we're both suspended. Mad as hell, your head a bell, like an angel's arse upended. You're a poet but you'd never know it...' (139).<sup>17</sup> The purpose of this simple verse in the ST can only be explained as a rhetorical device, in other words it has





a mnemonic function. The allusion to William Blake is signposting the use of the Romantic theme on which the fictional space of this narrative has been partially constructed but it has been, once again, filtered through an Australian discourse: William has become the irreverent but more Australian colloquial 'Bill' and he has been contextualised into the life and times of a small fishing town bordering the Indian Ocean. As in the preceding example, here too the Italian translation is a verbatim rendition of the original ST phrase without any form of explication. Leppihalme maintains that this strategy may undermine the writer's central theme and lessen the potential for the target reader to recover the deeper levels of meaning which are available to the source reader (234).

In the specific case of *Dirt Music*, I suggest that this is indeed what occurs. My study of the Italian translation of *Dirt Music* has revealed that despite the availability of alternatives, a blanket strategy of conservation with no further guidance has been adopted. Possible explanations for this translating choice relate directly to the translator's opinion of the role of culturally specific references in the text. In other words, he may have argued that they were few and/or of little importance in the development of the narrative; however, as this paper has demonstrated, this is clearly not the case. The fact that the references were neither omitted nor substituted with suitable TT references but rather conserved without explication are an indication of the translator's confidence that the competent target reader will be able to recover the culturally specific allusions under discussion. Many Italian readers may well associate the proper names of the English romantics with the search of self in nature within the European literary tradition. What they may not be in a position to recover, without some guidance from the translator, are the connotations inherent in the specifically Australian re-contextualisation of this European theme.

The alternative strategy of substitution could have offered interesting solutions to this problem represented by culturally specific references. The replacement of source culture names with names from a similar tradition in the target culture might have offered acceptable solutions insofar as there are Romantic writers within the Italian literary tradition such as Ugo Foscolo and Giacomo Leopardi. This strategy has been



used with considerable success by other translators, especially those of Umberto Eco in whose texts culturally specific references abound. I refer, as an example, to Eco's novel *Foucault's Pendulum*, in which the character Diotallevi alludes to Leopardi's *L'infinito* by referring to "al di là della siepe".<sup>18</sup> The original phrase was successfully rendered by William Weaver in the English translation with the following reference to Keats: "...at every curve the peaks grew, some crowned by little villages; we glimpsed endless vistas. Like Darien, Diotallevi remarked..."<sup>19</sup> The fact that Foscolo's romantic themes are sometimes compared to those of Edgar Allen Poe may also have been significant for the recovery of a darker form of Romanticism. However, in the case of Leopardi, the simple inclusion of an intratextual gloss locating the ST reference within a TT literary tradition has meant that the reference to perhaps the most famous example of Italian romanticism has been maintained for the English reader.

Other European translators of *Dirt Music* have adopted the alternative strategy of omission. This novel has been translated into at least nine European languages, including French, German, Dutch, Russian, Swedish and Czech. In contrast to the Italian text, all these translations have made changes to the title of the narrative. Some like the Russian, Swedish and Czech, while not substituting the original title have, nevertheless, translated it into the target language. Interestingly, in the French, German and Dutch translations the original title has been omitted and substituted with a phrase which, to some extent, conveys notions of thematic allusions to the narrative. The French and Dutch translators have chosen to highlight the Australianness of the novel with the title *Over the edge of the world*.<sup>20</sup> The German translator has given his version the title, *The Singing Tree*.<sup>21</sup> This phrase draws on one of the most meaningful events of the narrative when, having reached the limits of endurance, Fox improvises a stringed instrument on the branches of a baobab tree and reconnects with the 'dirt music' of the title. In the Italian translation, the phrase "dirt music" is translated in the body of the text as "musica della terra"<sup>22</sup> or "music of the earth". This expression signifies connotations of spirituality which I believe are entirely unrelated to the original title that in the source language has strong associations with similar expressions such as "dirt



poor” or “dirt cheap”. Fox himself explains the term as “...Anythin[sic] you could play on a verandah. You know without electricity. Dirt music” (95). It is my opinion that target readers will be very unlikely to recover the culturally specific link between the phrase’s Italian translation and the untranslated title of the TT. It would appear that the choice to leave the title untranslated in the TT is a further example of the translator moving a term – which even in English may present problems of interpretation – across the cultural boundaries without any further explication, relying only on the author’s name to position the target readership.

Leppihalme suggests a further strategy: one of ‘pragmatic explication’ which can take the form of ‘explanatory changes’ and may include rewordings or explanatory additions, annotation or paratextual information as well as glossaries, footnotes or endnotes. The choice of footnotes in literary texts is a legitimate strategy but one that is considered inappropriate in the contemporary publishing industry because they may be construed as didactic or even disruptive in the prevailing climate in which fluency is the favoured option (2005:230). Franca Cavagnoli, the Italian translator of David Malouf claims that, especially in Italy, footnotes are a very delicate subject: “Many publishers refuse them point-blank and often forcibly domesticate the text without consulting the translator” (2003:75). Her translation of David Malouf’s *The Great World* includes footnotes on particular Australian usages but this, she explains is an example of a publisher who “is very careful to preserve the peculiarities of the prototext, provided the translator points them out and thoroughly justifies each footnote” (ibid).

In my opinion however, the most suitable strategy for the type of translation problems presented by this novel is a translator’s preface as suggested by Leppihalme. I maintain that this alternative strategy could prove extremely effective insofar as it would allow the transferral of all culturally relevant information that the translator deems necessary for the full appreciation of the ST and the source culture. Such an introductory chapter might include specific information like the themes of the text, the writer’s literary vision or his place within the source culture. By locating Winton’s narratives within a distinctly Australian tradition either



through some discussion of the issues raised in the earlier pages of this paper or identifying the major themes of his work by reference to his other narratives, the translator would have certainly enhanced the target readership's capacities to engage with the specific "Australianness" of this text. Moreover, translation strategies which allow for the explicitation of culturally specific themes might well constitute a step towards raising the profile of minor English-tongue literatures in an era in which they are packaged together under the Anglo-American umbrella. As an added advantage, such a strategy would raise the "visibility" of the translator whose considerable efforts in making the ST available to a target readership are – as evidenced by the critical reviews which I have discussed – usually completely overlooked. I maintain that this strategy would have been the optimal choice for the translator of *Dirt Music*.

In summary, I argue that the transfer of culturally specific articulations of a universal theme should form part of any translation strategy. My discussion has revealed that Winton's original representation of a metaphysical journey through a landscape reflecting menace and desolation has been lost because it has been translated within a European Romantic context. By failing to acknowledge *Dirt Music* as the product of a culture which has had to come to terms with a version of nature that is antithetical to that very tradition, the translator has overlooked an important sub-text and the target readership has received the narrative as a love story set against an exotic Australian backdrop. With a literary culture which has struggled, as happens in most post-colonial societies, to differentiate itself from the coloniser, Australian narratives have not yet succeeded in imposing themselves more markedly in a literary tradition dominated by British and American participants. That, in the Italian imaginary Australia continues to be perceived as a mythical place is due, in part, to the marginal position it occupies within that Anglo-American literary tradition. It is also partially due to translation strategies which privilege domestication over the foreignisation of source texts.

It is my contention that even within such a translation culture, there are strategies in place which the translator can adopt to bring about changes

in perceptions of the "Other". I believe that one of these strategies is indeed an introductory chapter or translator's preface. By the inclusion of material which the translator, through his/her own exposure to the culture, believes is pertinent to a better understanding of the text, target readers will be better positioned to access culturally specific discourses. Inevitably this will lead to a broadening of the repertoire of cultural images of the source culture available to the target culture. The translator thus succeeds not only in raising his own profile or 'visibility' but also in becoming that intermediary or bridge which is desirable for better understanding between cultures.

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## NOTES

- 1 From an interview with his Italian translator in which David Malouf remarks: "In Australian writing there are recognizably European themes and interests, symbols, aspirations, but they work themselves out here in a different society and under different circumstances." *Southerly*, Vol.63, no.1, p.73
- 2 Winton, T. *Dirt Music*, Picador, 2002. All future quotations refer to this edition.
- 3 A phrase first coined by Australian writer Marcus Clarke.
- 4 Given the time lapse since the publication in Italy of *Dirt Music*, it has proved impossible to access information directly from the newspapers, journals or websites cited. I refer the reader to the publisher's website while offering the following guidance: *Il Sole 24 Ore* and *Il Secolo d'Italia* are national newspapers directed towards an educated readership. *Il manifesto* is a daily newspaper belonging to the extreme left. *Il Mucchio Selvaggio* and *ciacomo* are dedicated literary websites with an unquantifiable readership.
- 5 "Il suo stile e' inconfondibile". (*Il Secolo d'Italia*, 29/5/05).
- 6 "...nervosa, dura talvolta, essenziale con i suoi dialoghi che stanno inglobati negli squarci descrittivi come poetiche didascalie". (*Il Sole24Ore*, 29/5/05).
- 7 "Un'assoluta maestria, sostenuta da una lingua asciutta ed essenziale". (M. Bartocci, *il manifesto*, 9/8/2000)
- 8 *The Wilderness Letter* was directed to the U.S. Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Committee in 1960 and addressed the question of preserving the American wilderness. (*Il Secolo d'Italia*, *ibid*)
- 9 "... parente prossimo del romanzo per australianita', paesaggi e scandali al sole..." (*Il Mucchio Selvaggio*, 21/11/2005)
- 10 "...un nuovo Robinson Crusoe" (*Il Sole 24 ore*, *ibid*)
- 11 "...sospeso a metà strada tra la grandezza di disegno dei naturalisti dell'800 (Zola, Verga,





- Balzac)..., e le inquietudini tutte post-moderne di un McEwan o di una Woolf. (*Il mucchio selvaggio*, 29/4/2003)
- 12 ... una natura dalla bellezza magica" (*Il Secolo d'Italia*, op cit)
- 13 ..."gli sconfinati paesaggi australiani (*ciacomo*, 14/10/05)
- 14 "... un'isola che scivola via dalla carta geografica come un granello di polvere". (*Il Sole 24 Ore*, ibid)
- 15 "Un viaggio affascinante che mostra un continente...dai territori vergini dove ancora vale la pena di inoltrarsi". (*ciacomo*. ibid).
- 16 The TT reads: "...e lui si muove fra i loro versi come un uomo che rimette piede sul patrio suolo. Si arrampica sui dirupi del *Preludio* e di *Tintern Abbey*, attraverso la calda, scintillante Emily, e penetra nello spinoso sottobosco di Bill Blake. I versi vanno a lui." (2005:325)
- 17 'Bill Blake non era un gran pescatore, pero' entrambi siamo sospesi. Un inferno, poveraccio, la testa un campanaccio, come il culo di angeli appesi. Sei un poeta ma non l'avresti mai saputo...' (2005:127).
- 18 "Ma tra picco e picco si aprivano orizzonti interminati – al di là della siepe, come osservava Diotallevi..." (Eco, 2004:66)
- 19 ibid. p.67
- 20 *Par-dessus le bord du monde* (French title) and *Over de rand van de wereld* (Dutch title).
- 21 *Der singende Baum*.
- 22 "Tutto quello che si poteva suonare in una veranda. Sai, senza elettricità. La musica della terra" (2005: 90).

